

In the Matter of)
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En Banc Hearing)
Policies and Rules Concerning)
Children's Television Programming)
)
Revision of Programming Policies)
for Television Broadcast Stations)

MM Docket No. 93-48

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

**ORAL PRESENTATION OF
MARGARET LOESCH, PRESIDENT OF
FOX CHILDREN'S NETWORK**

Good morning. I am Margaret Loesch, President of Fox Children's Network. I'm pleased to be with you this morning.

This is my 25th year in television, and I've been involved in children's television for 20 of those years. I've held creative executive positions at Marvel Productions, Hanna Barbera, NBC and ABC, and I joined Fox Children's Network at its creation in early 1990. FCN is the result of an unprecedented collaboration between Fox Broadcasting Company and its affiliates. In just four years, FCN has grown to be a leading supplier of children's programming and currently we are number one in children's audience share and rating. Most directly relevant to this proceeding, FCN will be presenting a total of three hours per week of solid-curriculum-based educational programming for children.

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In the interest of total candor, I want to start by telling you that I am among the many Americans who do not like the government telling them what to do. However, I also am among the first to admit that passage of the Children's Television Act has made a material difference in the amount of children's curriculum-based programming offered by all broadcasters. At Fox, in particular, we have responded by producing a Saturday morning curriculum-based program that also has been a critical and rating success. And this fall we will be the only network to present a daily weekday educational program for preschoolers.

Let me begin by describing our Saturday morning program **Where On Earth is Carmen Sandiego?** When our Affiliate Board came to us requesting that Fox affiliates be able to look to us to fulfill station programming obligations under the Act, I was skeptical that we could provide educational programming that met the high standards of excellence, in terms of popularity with children, that we set for the entertainment portion of our schedule. But, despite my initial reservations, we used all of our experience and talents to deliver to children a compelling and imaginative series.

I understand that you will hear from its producer today, as well, about our struggles to develop a curriculum for television that both captures children's interest and educates them. One reason we chose **Carmen**, after it had been passed on by

another network, was that **Carmen** was already known to children from video games, as well as the PBS Series. We also felt that we knew how to further develop the concept to capture children's imaginations and stimulate independent creative thinking. Our creative executives worked closely with the show's producer, and our struggles to create the product envisioned ultimately required us to delay the program's premiere for six months in order to ensure quality. DIC, the production company for **Carmen**, had to spend over its budget and as a result came back to FCN for additional financial assistance, to meet our quality standards. In an effort to maintain the excellence of **Carmen**, we have increased our financial investment in the series by almost \$2 million. But, I think all would agree that those struggles were worthwhile. **Carmen** turned out to be exactly the series we envisioned and were trying to achieve. **Carmen** won its time slot on only its second airing, and it continues to be enormously popular with children. We get volumes of positive mail from children, parents and educators alike. One teacher wrote us that the program is assigned as homework and discussed in class. When you view **Carmen**, you will see that the series is extremely entertaining, as it must be to capture children's attention.

In the light of **Carmen's** success, it may sound less strange to you when I state that one of our guiding principles in developing educational programming is that we will not devalue our franchise by presenting any so-called "educational" program

that is any lower in quality and entertainment than every other offering on our schedule. Our current efforts are directed toward developing a weekday educational series for pre-school children, provisionally entitled **Fox Cubhouse** intended to premiere this September. The series comprises a wheel of three different series programs, each with a different educational orientation. As with **Carmen**, we employ independent expert consultants for each program.

Through the anchor of the **Cubhouse** cast of characters, we will take our audience through a preschool curriculum that focuses on nature and the environment, group entry and like social skills, and music and movement. Our nature series is the latest to come from the legendary Jim Henson Productions, in association with Survival Anglia, featuring vast footage from their wildlife library. Our socialization component, **Johnson & Friends**, will be the result of a break-through collaboration among Fox Children's Network, Film Australia and WQED, Pittsburgh, the public broadcasting powerhouse responsible for children's educational programming classics such as **Mr. Roger's Neighborhood**, **Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?** and **Wonderworks**. Each episode will be carefully crafted to address the emotional and educational needs of today's preschooler, dealing with topics such as sharing, friendship, teamwork, individuality and family concepts in a developmentally appropriate way. **Rimba's Island**, produced by DIC, producers of

Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?, uses multi-cultural music, rhythmic movement and simple stories to introduce traditional preschool concepts and to introduce them to cultural diversity. We have high hopes that this pre-school program wheel will reach the standards of excellence and success set by **Carmen** and our other entertainment programs.

From its inception, FCN has been committed not only to quality entertainment but also to public service, both on and off the air. Although the Commission has stressed the importance of long-form educational programming, our experience has been that attractive short-segment interstitial material, embedded throughout the entertainment programming that we know children are watching, is a most compelling means of conveying information to our audience, perhaps more effective than standard-length programming. Indeed, the standard program lengths were not designed to best take advantage of the developing cognitive abilities of young children. Rather, short segments, which grab children's attention immediately and hold it briefly, have been shown to be a much more effective didactic tool for the electronic media.

In recognition of this, FCN has devoted over \$2 million over the past four years to the production of interstitial material in a wide variety of subject areas, including pro-social values, safety, nature, science, geography and the environment. Our

Totally For Kids interstitial minutes are a series of messages that stimulate thought, create deeper awareness and impart to children valuable, practical information that they can apply to their own lives. The progressive focuses of these spots can be likened to a series of ever-broadening circles, starting with the child's inner self and emotions, progressing to the child's immediate surroundings and finally addressing the world at large. The **Totally for Kids** interstitial messages most recently won a **PEABODY AWARD**; previously these interstitials have won an Action for Children's Television Outstanding Achievement in Children's Television Award for the 1990-91 season and that season's PSAs placed as a finalist for best director, International Monitor Award. FCN also recently received a prestigious National Education Association Award for the Advancement of Learning Through Broadcasting for its 1992 public service announcements. I shall present a short videotape of representative samples after my oral presentation, as the following descriptions simply fail to capture the vibrant intensity with which these messages are conveyed.

A Message Totally For Kids addresses the child's inner world of thoughts and feelings. These moving motivational vignettes feature children reflecting on such topics as the meaning of patience, self image, empathy, creativity, respect and excellence. Our series of "music video" PSAs puts important social values, such as gender equality, racial harmony and

individuality, to music in an attractive, contemporary context.

The Totally Kids Detective Agency public service announcements are designed to teach children how to be street smart in the world around them. With the help of child advocate and **America's Most Wanted** host John Walsh, three young detectives illustrate everyday situations that signal potential danger and provide concise information on how to handle such situations in a simple, smart and safe manner. Another series in which John Walsh is featured teaches healthy nutritional values.

Addressing concerns related to the world at large is a series of **Totally For Kids** interstitials messages regarding environmental issues and an another series designed to teach children to be culturally aware, i.e., "art smart." The **Mr. Wizard** series of spots address scientific issues of interest to our young audience.

We doubt that de-emphasizing the importance of short-segment educational material in favor of standard-length programming actually will inure to the educational benefit of the child audience. This may be a case where more, in the sense of longer, is not always better. Indeed, the total time FCN devotes to educational interstitial material per week may well be equivalent to a standard-length program, in addition to our curriculum based series, **Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?**

Another unique use we put to interstitial messages is exemplified with the wildly successful program, **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers**. We knew that children would delight in **Power Rangers** from the moment we screened it, but we felt that the show's live action format warranted some reminders. We produced ten different public service announcements, designed to teach the difference between fantasy and reality and suggest nonviolent means of conflict resolution, and incorporated one at the end of each program. We have heard, though only anecdotally, that some children consider these PSAs to be the best part of the show. One anecdote that I would like to share with you is a letter from the parents of a Bethesda, Maryland five-year-old crediting **Power Rangers** for teaching him how to fall safely and saving him from possibly fatal injuries when he ran into the street and was struck by a mini van. A copy of this letter is attached to this statement.

FCN relies not only upon academic literature in and expert consultants developing program concepts, but also screens its programming for an Advisory Board comprising individuals who work with all kinds of children everyday--a pediatrician, a child psychologist, a welfare worker, an educator, a policeman who works with juvenile offenders and runaways, among others--many of whom also are parents. The Board critically evaluates the messages in our short- and long-form programming and provides invaluable input to FCN program executives, based both on the

professional expertise and objectivity of its members. We currently are in the process of establishing an additional advisory group composed of children. They won't just tell us what programs they like, but we also want to know what the issues are in their lives.

We are extremely proud of FCN's efforts and accomplishments. But we do not believe that they are unique among broadcasters. FCN's commitment to serve our child audience is shared by many other broadcasters. While we like to think that this commitment preceded any legislation or regulation, perhaps you will find as you evaluate today's proceedings that the spur of legislation in fact appears to have stimulated our own curriculum-based program offerings for children and those of other broadcasters.

FCN is proud of its programming record, particularly in light of its short history, and we think it is beyond dispute that the overall impact of our entire schedule, including long-form and short-segment programming, has "further[ed] children's positive development..., including serving their cognitive/intellectual or social/emotional needs..." in a variety of creative and imaginative ways.

We try to use the awesome power of our medium to address important social, environmental and health issues that may not be addressed in school. In the overall context of entertainment,

all of our programming includes elements that are designed to teach children to rehearse strategies they will need in dealing with others and to feel good about themselves. In this context, the extraordinary difficulty and subjectivity of the judgment on which side of the fine entertainment/education line a particular program will fall is evident.

For example, one of our first series, **ZaZoo U**, situated at a school, was designed to celebrate words and language, including poetry. **Fox's Peter Pan & the Pirates**, based on the classic James Barrie book, also emphasized language and vocabulary. Tim Curry, the voice of Captain Hook, won an Emmy as Outstanding Actor in an Animated series in 1990-91 season. **Animaniacs**, and FCN series produced by Warner Brothers, won a *Peabody Award* for excellence in programming. We also assisted Children's Television Workshop in the launch of its Public Broadcasting Service series, **Ghostwriter**, a program devoted to literacy, both by promoting the PBS series and broadcasting the premiere episode on Fox. **Bobby's World** addresses social and family issues that children face in their real lives. **Bobby's World** was nominated for an Emmy as Outstanding Animated Program in the 1990-91 season. The overall theme of the popular **X-Men** series is how limiting society's or individuals' lack of tolerance for differences can be. **Dog City**, featuring a cartoon within a cartoon, is intended to encourage creativity and imaginative thinking. I am not here suggesting that all the programs on our

current schedule necessarily meet the definition of "educational and informational programming" intended by the drafters, which we understand to mean in some sense "curriculum-based."

Nevertheless, I appreciate the difficulty the Commission faces in administering a statute with a mandated program content component. FCN's good faith efforts at compliance with the Act, and those of other broadcasters, undoubtedly will continue. We at FCN treat our children's schedule as seriously as any adult schedule: All the programs in our line up must fit together conceptually and be of consistently high quality. These are our own creative standards. Children are as discerning an audience, in terms of quality, as adults, and it is our most important goal to continue to meet the high standards our child audience sets for us, whatever kind of programming is mandated and in whatever quantity.

June 10, 1994

7805 Fairfax Road
Bethesda, Md.
20814-1317
15 May 1994

Ms. Margaret Loesch
Fox Children's Network
5746 Sunset Blvd. - Suite W635
Hollywood, California 90028

Dear Ms. Loesch:

We are writing to you because the Power Rangers television show helped to save our son's life yesterday. We understand that some parents are not fans of this show, so we particularly wanted you to know about a serious and positive outcome of your work.

Our son, Jesse, is almost 5 years old. He and our other children (Samantha, almost 8 years; Victoria, 3 years; and Zachary, 6 weeks) all are rabid fans of the Power Rangers. For a year or so, we (except for Zachary) have practiced how to fall by shoulder roll, again and again and again. They are fond of practicing shoulder rolls, flips in the air, and a wide assortment of falling techniques. As they watch the Power Rangers show and videos, they emulate the Power Rangers and practice their moves. Our children have every PR toy that they can find and they have a deep understanding of the messages of fair play and helping others. They particularly like the lessons that are taught at the end of each episode.

Yesterday, Jesse darted across our street and was hit squarely by a minivan. The van screeched to a halt but only after striking him in the side and head. That's when the miracle took over. Jesse literally flew in the air in the direction of the car's forward motion as we looked on horrified. He immediately tucked in his head and arms, flipped in the air, and hit the road with a shoulder roll. Neil (the father) ran to attend to him and found his face covered with blood. Because he was crying and conscious, Neil raced him into the house, washed his face, and put ice on a contusion on his forehead. Meanwhile, Nancy (the mother) gathered the other children and called 911. Within minutes, neighbors, rescue squad, and police were on the scene and performing superbly. As the rescue team checked Jesse for a concussion, broken bones, neck injury, and organ damage, they expressed their amazement at his seemingly minor injuries. Still, they treated him seriously in case the internal damage was extreme, and we were rushed to the National Children's Hospital (Washington, D.C.) emergency trauma unit.

At the ER, we received excellent attention and Jesse was examined for a concussion, neurologic damage, organ damage, and orthopedic injury. All of these tests proved negative. His only injuries were a forehead contusion and cuts on his face (that we later realized were a result of facial impact with the hood of

the car) and scrapes on his knees and elbows from the pavement. The ER physician and staff, frankly, were amazed at his sidestepping of a major injury or worse. We explained that we have taught him how to fall (in case of bike accidents, we thought) and that his love of the Power Rangers keeps him practicing every day.

Our children asked us to write to you to thank you and the Power Rangers for your role in this escape. They also want to recommend that you teach a lesson on your show about how to fall and minimize impact. In addition, they would love to meet the Power Rangers, thank them in person, and help them develop a teaching unit on how to fall. Please let us know if there is any way for you to honor these requests.

Keep up the good lessons integrated with your action episodes. Perhaps you will save more than one life.

Yours truly,



Neil and Nancy Grunberg

cc: Mr. H. Saban